

Kakwa Provincial Park

Background Report Summary

What is Kakwa and how did we get here?

Park establishment

The 171,000-hectare *Kakwa Provincial Park* officially came into being in June 1999. Its Class-A Provincial Park status came after more than 30 years of consideration for parkland, and following 12 years of designation as a Recreation Area.

Location and access

Situated 180 kilometers east of the city of Prince George and 70 kilometers north of the town of McBride, Kakwa Provincial Park abuts the BC Alberta border and extends the unbroken chain of Rocky Mountain parks northwards by nearly 60 kilometers. Access within BC is via the Walker Creek Forest Service Road, that leaves Highway 16 just west of Ptarmigan Creek, about 70 kilometers northwest of McBride. This graveled road extends 85 kilometers from the highway to the park boundary at Buchanan Creek, although the last 12 kilometers from Bastille Creek are presently washed out. From Alberta, access is via the Kakwa River Forestry Road from Grande Prairie, and thence by old tote roads that are now used as trails.

Features

Kakwa is a large, mostly undisturbed ecosystem that is home to a wide range of wildlife, including the northernmost population of Rocky Mountain big horn sheep, as well as grizzly bear, black bear, moose, caribou, mountain goat and many others. It contains within its borders a portion of the Front Ranges ecosection – the only occurrence in British Columbia; as well as the most northerly mountains over 10,000 feet (3,048 meters) in the Canadian Rockies. Kakwa also offers many backcountry recreational opportunities that must be balanced with each other and with the ecological characteristics of the park.

Where do we go from here?

The planning process

The development of a Management Plan for Kakwa Provincial Park is the first planning priority of BC Parks in the Prince George District. To that end, we are seeking your input and involvement to help create a long-range Strategic Management Plan that will protect the ecological integrity of the park; and secondly, to identify compatible backcountry recreation opportunities within the park.

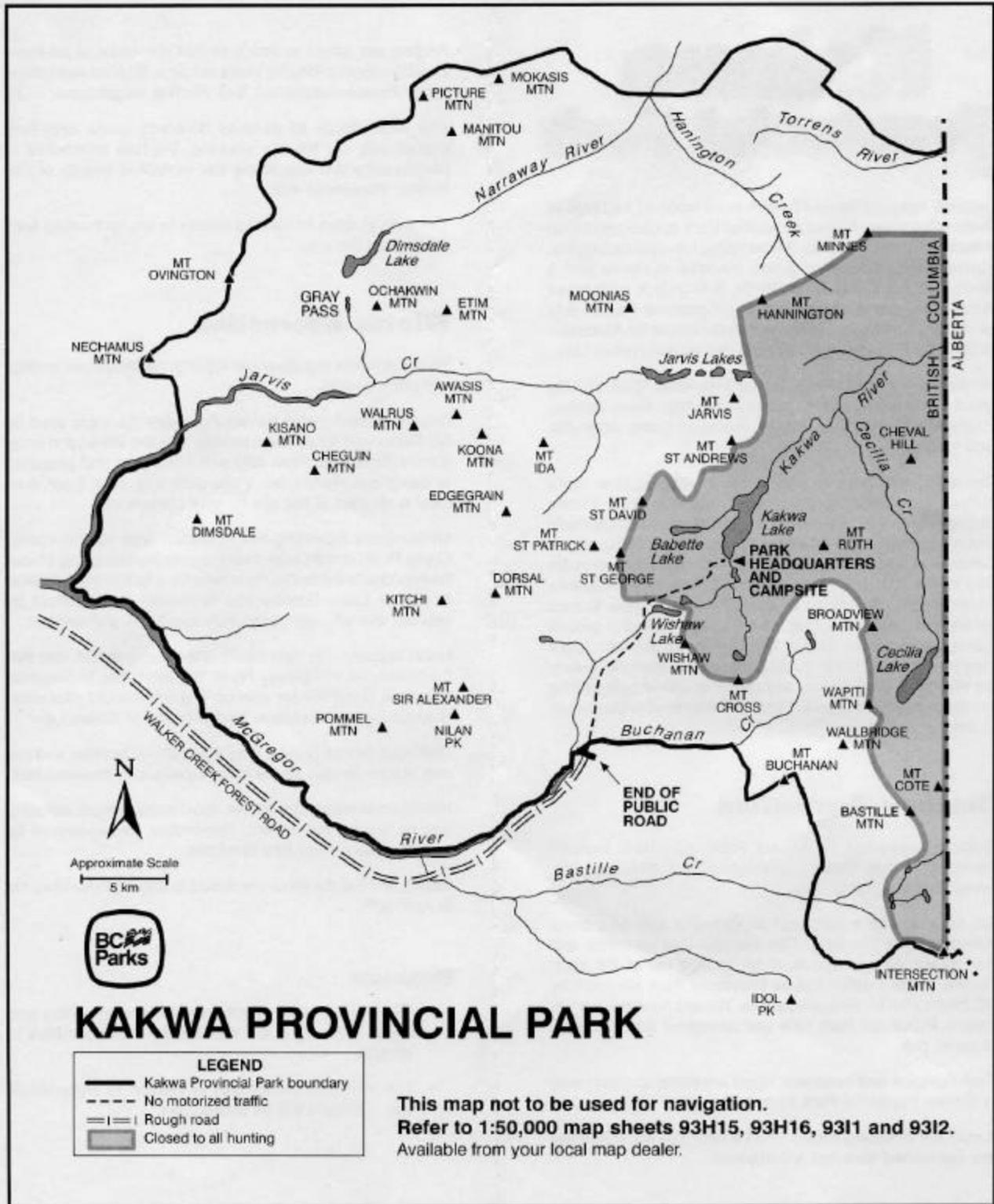
The Management Plan will be ecosystem based. In developing the plan, we will consider the adjoining Kakwa Wildland and Willmore Wilderness parks in Alberta, as well as land uses surrounding Kakwa in both provinces. The Management Plan will recognize that ecosystems, including watersheds, wildlife, and recreational activities, cross park and provincial boundaries and so are partly dependent on adjoining lands. Our first priority will be to ensure the continued ecological integrity of the area and to manage in the context of these surrounding lands.

In preparation for this planning process, we have prepared a Management Plan Background Report for Kakwa. The document you are now reading is a summary of that report and is one of a series of newsletters that will be published throughout the planning process.

The complete Background Report can be viewed at the District office, public libraries, or on BC Parks' web site at: http://www.elp.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/planning/mgmtplns/mgmtexisg_1.htm. A limited number of printed copies are available.

Kakwa Provincial Park

Background Report Summary



Kakwa Provincial Park

Background Report Summary

Historical perspective

The Beaver and Carrier First Nations were among the first people to use Kakwa; followed in the eighteenth century by the Cree, Iroquois and Metis who began to enter the area during the westward expansion of the fur trade. The name, Kakwa is derived from the Cree word for “porcupine.” In the winter of 1875, Canadian Pacific Railway surveyor Edward W. Jarvis led a mixed party of native and non-native men along the river that now bears his name, crossing the continental divide in the midst of Jarvis Lakes on February 25th of that year. Fortunately for the wilderness character of the future park, the grade was too steep for a railway. Indeed, the valley west of Jarvis Lakes with Mount Ida and the Three Sisters towering above on its south side is one of the most spectacularly rugged scenes to be found anywhere.

By the early 1900’s, Kakwa had begun attracting international parties intent on big game hunting, exploring, climbing and surveying. The unavailability of the European Alps during the wartime period of 1914-1918 heightened interest in the Canadian Rockies; and Kakwa became accessible to extended horse packing trips staged from the new transcontinental railway in what is now Mount Robson Provincial Park.

Kakwa Provincial Park’s highest peak, the glaciated 3,270-meter Mount Sir Alexander, was first climbed in 1929. The slightly smaller and more northerly Mount Ida, described and named by Jarvis in 1875, was not climbed until the 1950’s. Both are challenging and dramatic-looking peaks: an icefield surrounds Mount Sir Alexander, and the beauty of Mount Ida is revealed in its classic pyramidal shape. Their relatively late first ascents reflect the difficulty of access, a situation that helped to keep Kakwa in a state of near wilderness for most of the twentieth century.

In the 1960’s, logging roads began to be pushed towards Kakwa from the west. This prompted a recommendation within the Provincial Parks Branch of the day that the headwaters of Kitchi Creek should be examined for their scenic qualities and recreation potential before the area was committed to logging. The recommendation included an opinion that this was “the most scenic and interesting area in the Prince George vicinity... this scenery is enhanced by the snowcap surrounding these peaks in a setting of undisturbed virgin forests.” In 1971, the Peace River and Fraser Fort George Regional Districts proposed that Kakwa be protected. As logging moved closer in the early eighties, BC Parks flagged Kakwa as being of high interest during a Deferred Planning Area program.

In 1987, it was officially given Recreation Area status following recommendations of the Provincial Wilderness Advisory Committee. As a result of recommendations made at the public hearings held in Prince George, Kakwa’s boundary was extended north into the Narraway River drainage to include the significant wildlife and backcountry recreation values that exist there. During the decade that followed, Kakwa was the centrepiece of protected area recommendations being negotiated in the Prince George Land and Resource Management Plan. This LRMP was a five-year public land-use planning process, and in 1999 Kakwa finally came to fruition as a Provincial Park under recommendations of the combined LRMPs of Prince George and Dawson Creek.

The progression from wild land, to Recreation Area, to Class-A Provincial Park coincided with significant and growing recreational use of the area. In addition, a quartzite claim was explored at Babette Lake in the early eighties. A new quartzite quarry was then established at the nearby McGregor Pass, where it is still active. The combined forestry and quarry developments resulted in rough roaded access to Kakwa from the BC side. On the Alberta side, oil and gas exploration were responsible for improved road access. These changes coincided with the increase in recreational use from both BC and Alberta, giving rise to both access and usage issues. These issues necessitated the development of interim operating plans for the Recreation Area and an increased presence by BC Parks' staff.

Kakwa Provincial Park

Background Report Summary

Regional context – lands adjacent to the park

Kakwa Park enjoys a biophysical continuity with the adjacent lands of Willmore Wilderness Park and Kakwa Wildland Provincial Park in Alberta. Because of its place in this parkland complex it is partly buffered from surrounding resource activities. As well, some adjacent lands in BC are designated for special management of resource activities to conserve old growth forest, wildlife habitat and recreation opportunities. Consequently, there is a core of trans-provincial wilderness parkland, surrounded partly by specially managed lands and partly by general resource lands.

Kakwa Wildland Provincial Park

Kakwa Wildland Park lies within the Rocky Mountain foothills, and is situated in alpine and subalpine terrain with extensive forests at lower elevations. Kakwa is the major river draining out of Kakwa Lake in British Columbia and flows across the northern section of the park into the Smoky River. For the most part, the streams and rivers in the park flow swiftly in deep, narrow valleys that have some canyon sections, waterfalls and rapids. Much of the area is in a wilderness condition and provides a northward extension to Willmore Wilderness Park. This undisturbed region is frequented by moose, deer, caribou, black and grizzly bear and contains some of the northernmost bighorn sheep range in Alberta.

Willmore Wilderness Park

Foothills and mountainous terrain with extensive alpine meadows characterize the natural landscape and support a wide array of plant communities in transition across the park. The spectacular scenery is popular for trail riding and trophy hunting. Wildlife migrates through Willmore and adjacent lands in search of summer and winter range. These include mountain caribou, bighorn sheep, and grizzly bears, and require special management consideration as they cross provincial and park boundaries. The predominant fish species is bull trout, which is a threatened species in Alberta.

Adjacent lands in BC

The Prince George LRMP recognized areas of special interest:

- ⚡ The upper Herrick Creek on the northwest corner of Kakwa conserves old growth forest, caribou and grizzly bear habitat while providing opportunities for backcountry recreation. No timber harvesting is permitted there.
- ⚡ The McGregor and Dezaiko Ranges abutting Kakwa Park on its south and west sides have caribou habitat and backcountry recreation designated as priority values. Resource development is permitted provided measures are in place to protect these values.
- ⚡ The McGregor River zone on the southwest boundary of Kakwa Park recognizes integrated management of a wide array of resource values. Much of this area was clearcut and replanted before the LRMP was completed and will provide opportunities for comparative study as it grows back.

The Dawson Creek LRMP recognized:

- ⚡ The area north of Kakwa as a Wildlife/Coalfield Special Resource Management Zone. The management direction for this area recognizes important habitats for grizzly bear, Bighorn sheep and other large mammals, as well as wilderness outdoor recreation experiences. Other key resource values like timber, oil and gas, coal, minerals and commercial and motorized recreation are also present with potential for future development. The plan recommends managing the area to sustain all of these resource values while recognizing that this is not a protected area.

Kakwa Provincial Park

Background Report Summary

The Robson Valley LRMP recognized:

- /// The Morkill Resource Management Zone next to the southeast tip of Kakwa Park, for the integration of fisheries, wildlife, timber, subsurface resources and tourism values, as well as recognizing its high grizzly bear values.
- /// The Boundary / Horsey Creek Resource Management Zone, also at the southeast tip of Kakwa, to ensure that resource development and other land use activities minimize impacts on high scenery, recreation, wilderness and environmental values within the zone and adjacent park areas.

Why is Kakwa special?

Geographical context

To answer this key question, we consider what makes it provincially, nationally and perhaps globally significant, and how it fits into this larger scheme. Then, we can look at its natural resources and review the striking visual and backcountry recreation features that have brought it to the fore as one of BC's significant parks.

Kakwa Park is notable for the conservation role it has to offer through its natural resources and connections with other protected areas. The park reveals striking land formations from spectacular lake and valley systems to high, glaciated peaks that include the most northerly 10,000-footers in the Canadian Rockies. It lies on the border of British Columbia and Alberta and, unlike many other Rocky Mountain parks, roads and other transportation corridors have not dissected the park.

Wilderness area

Kakwa is the terminus of more than a million hectares of unroaded parkland stretching northwards from Highway 16. This area is the largest block of protected wilderness in the central and southern parts of the combined Rockies, BC and Alberta. The chain of parkland continues south of Highway 16 for a total of 600 kilometers from Kakwa to Height of the Rockies and Elk Lakes parks in the Kootenays. This contiguous, northwest-trending belt of parks and wilderness areas includes Kootenay, Yoho, Banff, and Jasper National Parks, BC's Mount Robson Provincial Park, and Alberta's Willmore Wilderness and Kakwa Wildland Provincial Parks. The latter two parks connect with Kakwa Provincial Park on its eastern border. Due to Kakwa's outstanding features and interconnectedness with these other protected areas, Kakwa Provincial Park is proposed for inclusion in the *Canadian Rocky Mountains World Heritage Site*.

Parks system significance

Kakwa is an important component of British Columbia's park system:

- /// It represents the only Front Ranges ecosystem in the province. The Front Ranges consist of rounded ridges and peaks of limestone, hundreds of millions of years old; and parallel valleys underlain with younger shale. In addition to the Front Ranges, Kakwa has one of the best representations of the Hart Ranges and together they provide habitat that is important to mountain goats, as well as those species that migrate through including grizzly bears and caribou. The Front Ranges is host to the northernmost herd of Rocky Mountain big horn sheep.
- /// Kakwa is a wild and undeveloped predator/prey ecosystem with important wildlife travel routes including Jarvis Pass, McGregor Pass-Kakwa Lake, Providence Pass and Sheep Pass.
- /// It contains the headwaters of numerous rivers that flow to both the Pacific and Arctic Oceans.

Kakwa Provincial Park

Background Report Summary

- // Extensive alpine meadows and ridges.
- // Important fossils and cave systems.
- // Through its linkage with the chain of Rocky Mountain parks, Kakwa provides a travel corridor for the many wildlife species that do not recognize human boundaries. This linkage is also of benefit to backcountry recreation enthusiasts; for example, the northern terminus of the Great Divide Trail lies within the park. For this reason, the future management of Kakwa Park must be examined not only at a local level, but also in a broader context.
- // Kakwa provides opportunities for a wide variety of wilderness dependent recreation activities.

Principal features of Kakwa:

Nationally and internationally significant

- // Mounts Sir Alexander and Ida – most northerly Rocky Mountain peaks over 10,000 feet.
- // Most northerly range of Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep.
- // Large undisturbed conservation zone for large carnivores including grizzly bears (which may migrate to feed on Chinook salmon) and wolves -- a complete guild of carnivores in an intact Rocky Mountain ecosystem.
- // Triassic fish fossil sites.
- // Karst terrain and caves.
- // Cross-section of the Rocky Mountains combining boreal, montane and taiga tree species.
- // Northern end of contiguous 600-kilometer stretch of Rocky Mountain parks.
- // Backcountry recreation activities include mountaineering, backpacking and hiking; horse riding and hunting; snowmobiling; caving; skiing.
- // Part of the largest protected wilderness area in southern Canada.

Provincially, regionally and locally significant

- // Spectacular section of the Rocky Mountains with many peaks, ridges, glaciers, cirques, alpine meadows, lakes, rivers, falls and valleys, with striking and often contrasting relief.
- // Only representation of the Front Ranges ecosection in British Columbia and one of the best representations of the Hart Ranges ecosection.
- // High capability habitat for mountain goats, and good habitat for grizzly bears, caribou, moose and bull trout.
- // The Kakwa Lake area is a major trans-mountain corridor for grizzly bears and other wildlife.
- // The Narraway watershed has good opportunities for hiking, wildlife viewing, hunting, and caving; and it includes the provincially significant Narraway Falls.
- // Kitchi Creek protects an isolated population of Douglas Fir and other ecological features, and was earlier proposed as an ecological reserve.
- // Representation of Engelmann Spruce Subalpine Fir zone.
- // Commercial and general backcountry recreation opportunities.
- // Large, mostly undeveloped and unroaded wilderness.

Natural resources and conservation values

Physical geography

Straddling the Continental Divide, Kakwa provides striking contrasts between the rugged glaciated peaks and deep valleys of its western side, and the rolling alpine meadows and open valleys of the central and eastern sections. The western side of the Divide ranges in elevation from 1,000 meters in the Jarvis Creek valley to over

Kakwa Provincial Park

Background Report Summary

3,048 meters around Mount Ida and Mount Sir Alexander. Glaciers and very steep cliffs cover much of the terrain on this side of the park; while on the eastern side of the Divide, valley bottoms become open revealing large water bodies and interconnected meadows.

Geology

Kakwa Provincial Park contains a full range of the geological formations that are found in the Rocky Mountains. Limestone and fragmented sedimentary rocks underlie the park, ranging in age from older than half a billion years to a little over 100 million years.

Significant geological features

The discovery of well-preserved Triassic fish fossils in the park is of international significance. There are fewer than 20 areas throughout the world which house similar fossils and only six localities that have yielded more than five classes. Thus far, several types of bony fish have been identified in Kakwa. Due to the sensitive nature of the sites, the locations will remain protected and open only to scientific study.

Many caves have formed in the park's limestone, often along contact lines with the same quartzite that gave rise to the two quarrying ventures in the park. Many of these caves are unexplored and others are likely to be found. Cave resurgences, or places where underground streams reappear at the surface, are common features of the Mount Sir Alexander and Mount Ida areas.

Evolution of the land forms

Ice sheets covered Kakwa Park 10,000 to 20,000 years ago during the last glaciation period, known as the Wisconsin. During that time two major ice sheets coated western Canada: the Laurentide and the Cordilleran. The Laurentide originated in the eastern part of the Northwest Territories and moved southwest, while the Cordilleran originated from the west-southwest and flowed northeast across the mountains onto the plains of Alberta. The gradual meeting of these ice sheets created the deep wide valleys in the park, and the cirques and residual glaciers found along the northeast facing slopes of the Continental Divide. Kakwa has all the usual characteristics of glaciated scenery found in the Rocky Mountains.

Soils

Soils in Kakwa Park are generally comprised of fine glacial till deposits in lower elevation and flatter terrain, and landslide and glacial moraine deposits closer to the mountains and the glaciers. The areas of fine silt are prone to "mucking" and erosion, especially in combination with late snow melt and summer rains. Wet meadows, common in the northeast half of the park, are muddy and easily damaged, for example by horse use at Kakwa Pass.

Climate

Because of its complex climatic conditions, weather in Kakwa Park can be unstable. Variables include elevation, terrain and the influence of major weather systems. During the summer season, air from the Pacific Ocean is moisture-laden and is captured on the western side of the Continental Divide, allowing warm dry air to suspend over the east fringe of the ranges. Throughout the winter months arctic air flowing south causes unrelenting conditions on the eastern section of the divide as it hits the barrier caused by the mountain range. The area generally experiences a high snowfall.

Kakwa Provincial Park

Background Report Summary

Water

Kakwa Park is situated on the Continental Divide, and consequently its rivers drain both north to the Arctic Ocean and west to the Pacific Ocean. The area encompasses the headwaters of the McGregor River, a major tributary of the Fraser. Kakwa River and Narraway River drain east and north of the Rocky Mountains, where they provide an important source to the Prairies. Rugged mountains form a picturesque backdrop to subalpine lakes such as Kakwa, Jarvis, Cecilia, Dimsdale and Babette. The watersheds are fed by snow accumulated over the winter months and later in the season by melting glaciers. Water quality information has not been collected, but quality should be good in a lightly used mountain area. Increasing volume of snowmobile use may warrant monitoring, especially at Kakwa Lake.

Biology

Flora

The vegetation mosaic in Kakwa provides a wide variety of wildlife habitats.

- /// The dominant zones of Kakwa Park are the Sub-Boreal Forest that covers approximately half of the area at lower elevations and the Alpine Tundra at higher levels. The forested area is mainly Engelmann-Spruce Subalpine Fir, with Interior Cedar-Hemlock present in the lower portions of the Jarvis and Kitchi Creek valleys. There is also a small pocket of Douglas Fir in the Kitchi Creek valley.
- /// These interior wet belt and sub-boreal zones are affected by the westerly airflow that delivers considerable moisture to the southwest side of the park. The high mountains that make up the Divide form the transition between British Columbia's wet interior and BC's only representation of the Front Ranges eco-section. The Divide also marks the shift to the dry foothills of northern Alberta.
- /// There are extensive alpine meadows on the eastern side of the Divide. These respond negatively to disturbance and require a long time frame, decades or even centuries, to recover to their natural state.
- /// The north side of the McGregor from Jarvis to Kitchi Creek has been logged in the past; otherwise the vegetation cover in the park is undisturbed except for localized impacts at popular campsites, along hiking and snowmobile trails, and at the Wishaw quarry.

Fauna

Wildlife research has so far been sporadic, mostly habitat capability and geographic use rather than numbers. During the winter months, harsh climatic conditions and deep snow displace many animals from the area. Key species commonly seen by visitors during summer months are:

Grizzly Bears and Black Bears

The bears in Kakwa benefit from excellent habitat in the park, and the fact that the area has not been significantly fragmented by human disturbance. As a result, there are good numbers of bears, with black bears being more common at lower elevations. Grizzly bears use low and high elevation habitats throughout the seasons, but are at higher elevations in the summer. Grizzly bears require large spaces, and in Kakwa the forested valley bottoms of the McGregor, Kakwa, Narraway and Belcourt Rivers provide good habitat due to their moderate relief and elevation.

Recent studies show that Kakwa Lake is on a major trans-mountain corridor for grizzly bears, wolves, caribou and other wildlife. Grizzly bears are using some of the park trails and old roads for travel but most avoid the main park facilities at the south end of Kakwa Lake. Research is also being done to determine whether grizzlies

Kakwa Provincial Park

Background Report Summary

migrate in late summer and fall to feed on salmon in the Fraser River system. This habitat and bear movement data will be used to help BC Parks minimize bear-human conflicts.

Mountain Goats

Occupying high mountain crags throughout the park, mountain goats are a major wintering wildlife species in Kakwa Park and are the most widely distributed of the mountain ungulates. The Management Plan will consider the impact of winter recreation activities on these animals. In the context of summer recreation, the main access route into Kakwa, the Wishaw Mine Road, crosses a summer goat migration route.

Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep

On the open alpine ridges and basins in the northeast corner of Kakwa Park and across the border in Alberta, is the most northerly band of Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep. Microclimate plays an important role in their selection of areas, such as along rivers or creeks. Most sheep ranges are within easy reach of cliffs, with avalanche chutes and talus slopes used to escape from predators. This species, like others in Kakwa Park, continues to be of great importance due to the migration across park boundaries.

Mountain Caribou

Caribou are frequent visitors to the mountainous areas of Kakwa and adjacent parks. Seasonal migration brings them from the foothills around Grand Cache into the park during the spring and summer months, the primary factor affecting their migration being snow conditions. The number of animals is small; the population in Alberta has declined twice in the last 50 years from 2,000 animals to a few hundred, and is also considered vulnerable in the Robson Valley.

Other ungulates: Elk, Moose and other deer

Small numbers of elk occur within Kakwa Park around the Narraway and Edgegrain drainages as well as in the Sheep Pass and Intersection Mountain area. Moose are frequently seen during the summer, and appear to be the most common large mammal in the park. Tracks are found in the valleys, marshes and lower mountainous slopes, but are scarce in the alpine areas. Prime moose feeding habitat occurs in the lake shallows and at several mineral licks throughout the park. On the western side of the park, Moose spend their winters downstream in the McGregor River valley due to excessive snow depths in Kakwa Park, returning in the summer and fall months. Numbers of mule and white-tailed deer also occur within the park.

Birds

A wide variety of birds can be seen in Kakwa, typical of mountainous areas. These include golden eagles, bald eagles, hawks, belted kingfishers, spotted sandpipers, phalaropes, ruffed grouse, willow ptarmigan, diving ducks, golden-crowned sparrows, savannah sparrows, horned larks and many others. For a more detailed list of bird species observed in Kakwa Park refer to the Master Plan Background Report.

Amphibians and reptiles

There are no reptiles catalogued in Kakwa Park, and the only amphibian known to inhabit the area is the boreal toad that occupies forests and bogs throughout the park.

Fish

Prior to the 1980's, fishing in Kakwa was rated poor to fair. Then in 1981 and 1983 – before Kakwa became a Recreation Area – Cecilia and Kakwa Lakes were stocked with rainbow trout fry. Since then, a self-sustaining rainbow trout population has emerged and contributes to present-day thriving angling activities in Kakwa. Other fish species have been reported in the waters of Kakwa Park including arctic grayling and bull trout, species of special concern and sensitive to habitat disturbance.

Kakwa Provincial Park

Background Report Summary

Ecology

Kakwa Provincial Park is a large area whose ecosystems extend beyond its boundaries, and is comparatively little disturbed compared to some of the surrounding resource lands. It includes the mountain headwaters of rivers draining to both the Arctic and the Pacific oceans, and extensive intact forests. Factors such as climate, soil, elevation and moisture conditions mean that five of British Columbia's biogeoclimatic zones are represented in the park. These, in turn, provide a wide range of habitats that support a variety of species.

Except possibly for goats, populations of large animals move across park boundaries and do not spend the full year in the park. Kakwa is a fully functioning predator/prey ecosystem that supports all the animal species typical of the area. These factors, combined with its connectivity with other Rocky Mountain parks, mean that prospects are good to achieve BC Park's goal of maintaining ecological integrity—that is to say, a fully functioning ecosystem with all elements intact. *Preserving the ecological integrity of the park is the primary goal of the Management Plan.*

Cultural values

Explorers in the early twentieth century reported evidence of old hunting camps and trails. Aboriginal people visited the area for hunting, and passes were occasionally used for trading between the Peace and Fraser River watersheds. There have been no formal archeological investigations, and no archeological sites are known.

The first known people in Kakwa were the Beaver and Carrier, followed by the Cree, Iroquois and Metis during the westward expansion of the fur trade in the late eighteenth century. It was through the introduction of the fur-trade that the lifestyles of these groups were modified from a hunter and gatherer society to trading furs for supplies. After the Jarvis and Hanington party of 1875, other European explorers arrived in the area as members of hunting and survey parties.

Visual and recreation values

Visual features

Visitors to Kakwa Park enjoy superb mountain scenery, blue lakes, glaciers and spectacular alpine meadows. Two high mountain peaks dominate the area. Mount Sir Alexander reaches 3,270 meters and is surrounded by glaciers. 3,180-meter Mount Ida has a classically beautiful pyramid-shape, especially when viewed across Jarvis Lakes or from Moonias Pass. Kakwa's visual appeal is enhanced by the contrast between the comparatively low rolling hills of the northeast and the high peaks of the southwest. This is typical of the Front Ranges, and is one of the only places in BC where a difference of 1,500 to 2,100 meters is as apparent. The effect is that an observer in the alpine meadows always has a wide panorama of snow-clad peaks as a backdrop. One of the best visual features is the abundance of forests, plants and animals that a visitor is likely to encounter throughout the park.

Recreational features

Kakwa is a wilderness area, adjacent to others, that is ideal for backcountry recreational use. The most popular destinations are Kakwa, Cecilia and Jarvis Lakes, from which there are excellent day trip opportunities. The core area is at the south end of Kakwa Lake where the park headquarters and main campsites are located, and despite the existence of these basic facilities this is still wild country that visitors will often share only with its wildlife. Recreational features include:

- /// **Hiking and backpacking:** Primitive trails and routes radiate out from Kakwa Lake through valleys and to alpine meadows, providing many opportunities for day hikes and overnight trips. Extended backpacking and

Kakwa Provincial Park

Background Report Summary

wilderness camping trips provide a means to experience most of what the park has to offer. Kakwa is also host to the north end of Great Divide Trail, which follows generally along the spine of the Rockies and provides opportunities for longer backpacking trips outside the park boundaries.

- /// **Mountaineering:** Climbing opportunities exist on the park's high peaks and glaciers.
- /// **Horses:** Kakwa provides good opportunities for trail rides and horse packing trips. Many of the trails in the valleys, around the major lakes, and through mountain passes were originally developed through horse use.
- /// **Hunting:** This is another traditional use for the area, especially for bighorn sheep in the northeast. Kakwa and Cecilia watersheds are closed for hunting, as they are the main areas used for general recreation.
- /// **Fishing:** Enthusiasts may choose from Kakwa, Cecilia, Dimsdale and Babette Lakes, with Kakwa Lake being the most popular.
- /// **Snowmobiling:** This has become a popular winter recreational use of the park from both BC and Alberta, mostly in the Kakwa, Cecilia and Jarvis Lakes areas. There are many open ridges and meadows, and there is some spring use on the snowfields of the higher peaks. North of the Divide, areas above 1,400 meters are closed from May to November to avoid disturbing wildlife.
- /// **Backcountry skiing, snowshoeing and winter camping:** Good opportunities exist, although current access limitations may require the use of aircraft or snowmobile to reach the park.
- /// **Caving:** The caves of Kakwa Park are only partially explored, or unexplored, or yet to be discovered. Extreme hazards exist in these recently glaciated cave systems, and they are best entered only in the company of an experienced caving group.
- /// **Photography and natural history:** Good opportunities exist throughout the park, combined with many of the above activities.
- /// **Commercial backcountry recreation:** Operators have permits for trail riding, llama assisted hiking, guided hunting, and drop off flights to Kakwa Lake.

Current Uses

Recreation

Present summer and fall activities include wilderness camping, hiking, climbing, horse travel, hunting, fishing, and caving. Winter and spring activities include snowmobiling, skiing, climbing, caving, and winter camping.

Existing methods of tallying visitors are by volunteer hosts in the summer, occasional ranger patrols, and a voluntary guest registration book at the Kakwa Lake ranger cabin. Statistics are not complete, but the numbers show a few backcountry users appearing in June and July, with visitors peaking at over 150 in August and gradually falling off to below 50 in September and early October. In the winter and spring months, large numbers of snowmobiles (100 to 200 machines) use the park at peak periods such as Easter.

Facilities

Presently limited to informal campsites, trails and cabins around Kakwa and Jarvis Lakes.

Commercial tenures

Traplines, hunting guide/outfitting, llama assisted hiking, mountain guides, air access.

Kakwa Provincial Park

Background Report Summary

Mineral claims

Quartzite quarry near Wishaw Lake.

Access road

Used for quarry operations at Wishaw Lake.

Planning issues

The development of a Management Plan for Kakwa Provincial Park is one of BC Parks' highest priorities. The Management Plan will consider the following priorities and issues. BC Parks and the public may identify further planning issues and suggest ways to deal with them during the process.

Ecological integrity

- // Identify *ecological integrity* and how to maintain it in Kakwa.
- // Consider Kakwa's role as part of the larger protected wilderness area of the Rocky Mountain chain of parks.
- // Recognize and manage the special features that make Kakwa an important member of the provincial park system: high peaks; Front Ranges; key wildlife species; interprovincial wildlife movements; cross-section of Rocky Mountains; fossils, and alpine meadows.
- // Consider sound resource management of wildlife, forests, meadows and water.
- // Apply a *precautionary principle* in situations where there is limited natural resource inventory information available.

Recreation

- // Determine compatible types, amounts and locations of recreation use.
- // Decide on an appropriate role for commercial recreation and tourism, in consideration of opportunities available throughout the region.
- // Consider the commercial and non-commercial use of horses and llamas in the park.
- // Consider appropriate motorized and mechanized use, including snowmobiles, mountain bikes, floatplanes and helicopters.
- // Provide guidelines as to what level and type of park facility or interpretive development is appropriate.

Bear-people conflict prevention

- // Few bear-human conflicts have occurred in the past in Kakwa. A bear-hazard study is nearing completion for the core area of the park that will help to minimize potential conflicts with grizzly bears. The study will recommend careful management of most trails to minimize the risk of encounters, as well as the relocation of

Kakwa Provincial Park

Background Report Summary

one campsite along Kakwa Lake. Food and garbage management should also be improved, with bear-proof caches recommended at all established campsites.

Access

- /// Determine what access is appropriate to the park, and what if any development is desirable.

Resource extraction

- /// Review existing resource extraction: Wishaw quarry; trapping; hunting; fishing.

Cooperative management

- /// Consider cooperative, trans-boundary wildlife and recreation management efforts with Willmore Wilderness Park and Kakwa Wildland Park in Alberta.
- /// Coordinate management with Alberta Parks, the Ministry of Forests, BC Assets and Lands (for commercial recreation tenures,) and the Ministry of the Environment.

Promotion

- /// Consider the manner in which the park is promoted to the local and traveling public, taking into account the direction of the park plan and local and regional tourism efforts already in place.

LRMP recommendations

- /// The Prince George LRMP, in recommending Kakwa for protection, gave only very limited direction as to permitted uses within the park. Trapping and commercial guiding (non-hunting) are recommended uses, while all others are deferred to BC Parks' planning process – i.e. to this process.
- /// The Dawson Creek LRMP, in recommending the northern extension of Kakwa for protection, endorsed the standard compatible uses of protected areas, with the exception of allowing snowmobiling within designated areas, and recognizing trapping as an acceptable use. The plan also noted that some types of motorized recreational vehicles and boats may be restricted either by type of vehicle, time of year, or areas designated for use, those restrictions being developed through this public planning process.
- /// The Robson Valley LRMP recommends integrating uses on lands adjacent to the southeast tip of Kakwa to ensure that resource development and other land use activities minimize impacts on high scenery, recreation, wilderness and environmental values.

Impact assessment

- /// Before any proposed activities or facilities are adopted in the plan, an impact assessment must be completed.

Conclusion

Kakwa Provincial Park is a special place that already receives a wide range of enthusiastic visitors from BC, Alberta, and around the world. It rivals the beauty and grandeur of the national parks to the south, with the added

Kakwa Provincial Park

Background Report Summary

aspect of being almost entirely undeveloped. One can still experience what it might have been like in Jasper and Banff in the year 1900.

Our goal, as we embark on the planning process, is to find a way to keep the sense of wildness in Kakwa while making this wilderness available to compatible use. Our challenge is to maintain the ecological integrity of this sensitive mountain environment and find an appropriate balance of recreational use through this public process.